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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ANKARA 000719

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TAGS: PGOV PHUM PREL OSCE TU

SUBJECT: TURKEY: BILL EXPANDING KURDISH LANGUAGE
BROADCASTING SUBMITTED TO PARLIAMENT

REF: ANKARA 315

Classified By: A/DCM Janice G. Weiner, reasons 1.4 (b), (d)

¶1. (C) Summary and Comment: Parliament's Planning and Budget Subcommittee will take up a bill April 18 submitted by Turkey's state-controlled "TRT" broadcasting network to expand Kurdish-language (and other foreign language) broadcasting. The draft legislation follows up on PM Erdogan's February 17 announcement of GOT plans to broadcast in Kurdish to complement economic development plans for the Southeast. The historic legislation would give the GOT an opportunity to broadcast its own message, rather than having others outside of Turkey (such as Roj TV) control the message Turkey's Kurdish-speaking citizens are hearing. End summary and comment.

Kurdish Language Broadcasting Bill Submitted to Parliament

¶2. (C) TRT DG Ibrahim Sahin told us April 15 TRT submitted a bill to parliament April 13 that would expand Kurdish-language satellite broadcasting, as well as broadcasting in Farsi and Arabic. The Planning and Budget Subcommittee would begin to review the law April 18. According to Sahin, the legislation will allow TRT to devote one of its seven channels to non-Turkish broadcasting. If it passes, TRT plans initially to broadcast 12 hours in Kurdish, followed by 6 hours in Farsi and 6 hours in Arabic. If the project is successful, one channel could be devoted to 24-hour Kurdish-language broadcasts. Sahin noted there are no plans to broadcast in Armenian, but TRT executives would like to dedicate one channel to English-language news broadcasts.

¶3. (C) Increased Kurdish-language broadcasting is part of a comprehensive strategy to improve the situation in Turkey's southeast, Sahin explained. Following the Turkish military's cross-border operations against the terrorist Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), aided by US intelligence sharing, the government needed to embrace the mostly-Kurdish population in the Southeast and show the residents there are options other than joining the PKK. These broadcasts would complement the GOT's economic stimulus project, he predicted. The broadcasts also would reach beyond Turkey's borders to northern Iraq and Iran, where many people have ethnic Turkish heritage but do not speak Turkish.

¶4. (C) To succeed, the project requires broadcasting that appeals to a wide range of viewers, Sahin noted. Tentative plans call for a wide-array of family-oriented programs: children's shows, international movies dubbed into Kurdish, documentaries, music, sports, and educational lectures by prominent academics. They might also include basic Turkish language programs to help raise literacy among uneducated women in the Southeast, many of whom speak no Turkish. These women are the prime target, Sahin emphasized, since they both raise the next generation and lack education themselves.

¶5. (C) Sahin told us MPs on the Planning and Budget Subcommittee appeared receptive to the legislation when he presented the bill to them. Not a single MP, either GOT or opposition, raised objections to his presentation. They appear to understand the need for non-military action to help solve Turkey's Kurdish problem, Sahin said, adding the fate of the bill is now in parliament's hands. It was now a national issue. He acknowledged, though, that it is a "difficult" issue for some and, while he expects it will gain parliamentary approval, recognizes it will meet resistance in certain sectors.

Pro-Kurdish DTP Remains Skeptical

¶6. (C) The pro-Kurdish Democratic Society Party (DTP), whose members have often been hauled before a court on charges of using Kurdish, remain understandably skeptical. Abdullah Demirbas, a DTP sub-mayor recently fired and prosecuted for using Kurdish in municipal services in the Sur district of Diyarbakir, recalled the dozens of prosecutions against him for using Kurdish language, and thought increased

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broadcasting would be mere window dressing. In his view, ending the barrage of harassing prosecutions against Kurdish politicians would be the only way to get to the root of the problem.

EU, Human Rights NGOs Pleased

¶7. (SBU) European Commission Political Counselor Diego Mellado views the bill as an important step toward fulfilling Turkey's harmonization requirement of addressing the Kurdish problem. The EU will track the legislation's progress closely. Contacts in Turkey's human rights community also welcomed the news. Human Rights Agenda Association President Orhan Kemal Cengiz said the legislation would be an important step toward recognizing and embrace Turkey's vibrant mix of cultures.

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